# Titian's Mythological Paintings: A Pictorial Personal Code?

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# Personal codes

- Personal codes are social and cultural codes.
- Their sociality is peculiar since the communication population is made up of different mental states of the same individual brain (Marconi, 2023).
- Personal codes are cultural since their adaptors are human and, like all other cultural codes in nature, they can last even less than a lifetime.
- Poets and bilingual or bicultural people are outstanding examples of adaptors in personal codes.
- Linguistic personal codes show a complex **layering**: they share an **abstract linguistic system** and a set of more concrete **linguistic norms** with the rest of the speaking community, while having **individual norms and meanings** that depart from what is shared (Marconi, 2023).

# Words and Pictures

- “Humans are finite and defective beings who play with the infinite, such as on the ‘contested terrain’ (Mitchell) between verbal and visual, between text and picture” (Cometa, 2024, 130).
- The difference between text and picture can be traced back to their biological ground in terms of Marcello Barbieri’s distinction between the *world of* perceptual *objects* and the *world of names* (Barbieri, 2024, 207-217).
- The distinction is based on the different brain pathways employed in the elaboration of linguistic sounds and visual inputs and corresponds to different developmental environments, i.e. the fetal and the post-natal ones.

# Pictorial personal codes

- What they **cannot** be: **artistic codes** since the function of an artistic message would be reduced to the most general and vague meaning of *making art* (Garroni, 1977, 112-113).
- **Codes are not the only semiotic rules**: “codes are special types of legisigns, [...] while all codes are legisigns, not all legisigns are codes” (Jappy, 2013, 48)
- What they **can** be: pictorial personal codes are real codes since they **share** the **normative dimension** with the linguistic ones (both kinds of personal codes are made of norms constrained by legisigns), **yet linguistic legisigns or symbols are organized into codes and pictorial legisigns or images are not**.
- Thus, it is possible to formulate the **code/norm/legisign trichotomy** where the **norm is an intermediate entity** between systematic and non-systematic types or rules.

# Standard rules of Renaissance painting

**Fig. 1** – Masaccio: *The Tribute Money*, c.1425, fresco, 247 × 597 cm, Brancacci Chapel, Florence.

# Standard rules of Renaissance painting

**Fig. 2** – Michelangelo: *The Fall and Expulsion from Paradise*, 1508-12, fresco, 280 × 570 cm
Vatican City.

# Breaking the rules with a new rule

**Fig. 3** – Titian: *Perseus and Androme*
c.1554-56, oil on canvas,
183 x 199 cm, Wallace Collection,
London.

The individual norm of *locating episc*
*or references to them from the behc*
*left to right according to the chronol*
*order and without duplicating the*
*characters* is peculiar to Titian's *poes*

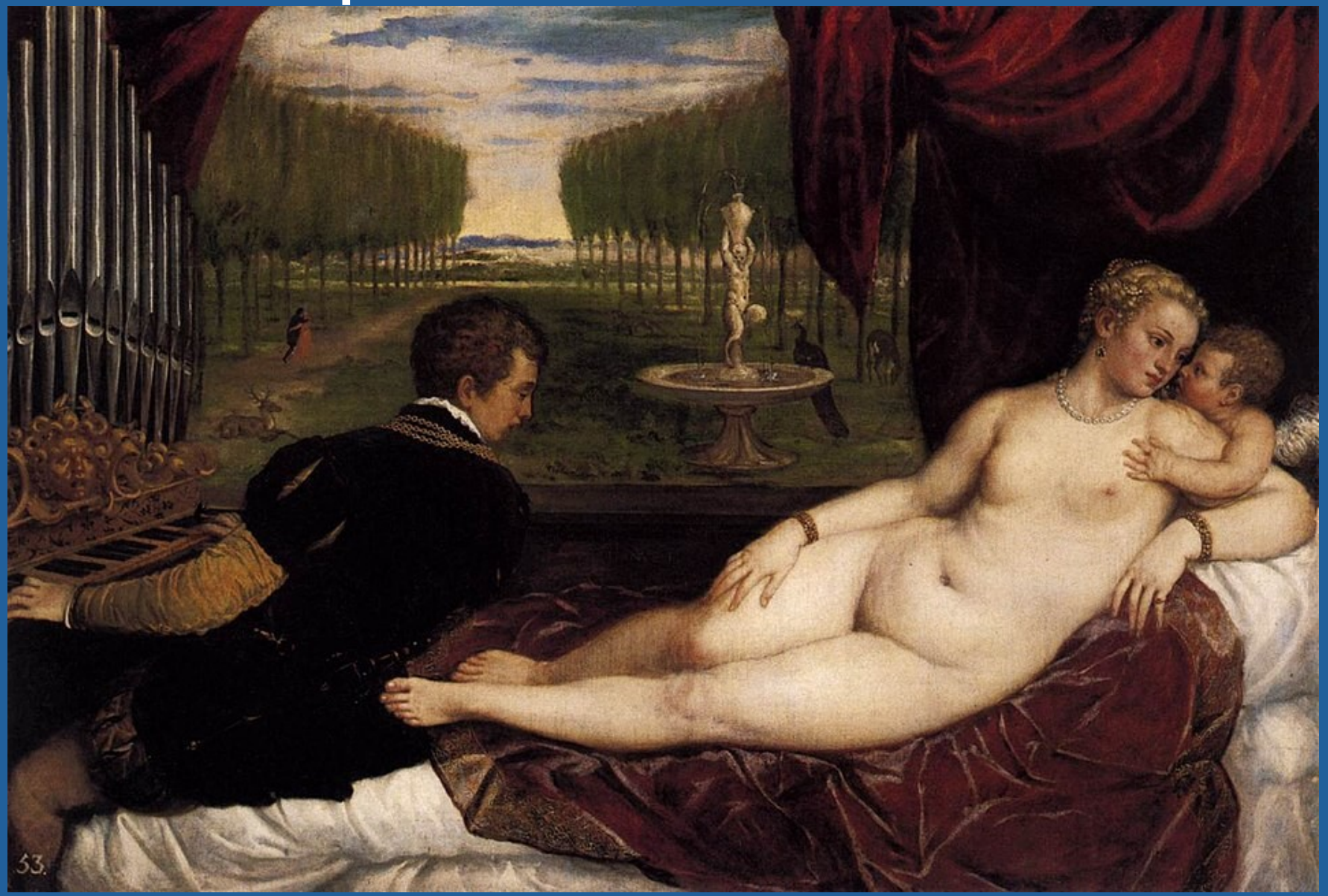
# Playing with the new rule

**Fig. 4** – Titian: *The Flaying of Marsyas*, c.1570-76, oil on canvas, 212 x 207 cm, Archbishop's Palace, Kromeriz.

The violin and the hanging flutes on the beho
left recall the music contest lost by the satyr
Marsyas. His horrible punishment by the divin
winner (Apollo) is shown at the center.
Nothing new seems to happen to the beholde
right. Yet the pensive Midas on the right is Titi
self-portrait. The last episode pictures the
invention of the picture (**metapicture**).

# A legisign and its replicas

**Fig. 5** – Titian: *Venus with an Organist and Cupid*, c. 1555, oil on canvas,
150,2 x 218,2 cm, Prado Museum, Madrid.



# A legisign and its replic

**Fig. 6** – Titian: *Venus and the Lute Player*, c. 1565, oil on canvas, 165.1 x 209.6 cm, The Met, New York.

# A legisign and its replicas

**Fig. 7** – Titian: *Venus and the Lute Player*, c. 1565, oil on canvas, 150.5 x 196.8 cm, The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.

# The Venus-like type

**Fig. 3** – Titian: *Perseus and Andromeda*,
c.1554-56, oil on canvas,
183 x 199 cm, Wallace Collection,
London.

Andromeda (fig. 3) is no exception to the
type: “Her appearance, in her full, naked
beauty, is like an upright version,
only more fully turned to the beholder,
of the *Danae* or of reclining Venuses,
except that here a small bit of drapery,
flowing in the wind, is protecting her
private parts” (Puttfarken, 2005, 168).

# Conclusions for social ontology

- It was Peirce's opinion that ontology should be based on semiotics (Peirce, 1998, 376).
- *The (modern) firm is simply a specific community, currently legally positioned, that is formally registered, within the wider, typically national (or international), community, as an emergent subcommunity of the latter, oriented to the collectively coordinated production of goods and/ or services to be sold to others, in a way that is intended to be advantageous to (at least some of) the community members. It is normally the case that (at least some of) that advantage is interpreted as 'profit'.* (Lawson, 2019, 98-99, already cursive in the original)
- Titian's case shows that a third dimension, a thoroughly semiotic one, is missing in Lawson's analysis: more than at the beginning of capitalist society, firms nowadays persist thanks to personal or brand-specific codes.
- The Venetian master's control over the organization of his workshop, intended to make it last beyond his lifespan, paradoxically made the workshop unable to survive without such control (Lüdemann, 2016, 248). This organization shows a personal code while spreading throughout the community.

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